

# ***Locked Up Learning!***



**The ViTaL Development & Research Programme**

**Report No. 3**



## **Background and Rationale**

Vinney Green Secure Unit provides secure accommodation and schooling for young people between the ages of 10 and 18. There are 23 beds in the Unit, for both boys and girls who are there as a result of four types of secure court orders. These can be as a result of the young person being considered a danger to themselves, or to other people. In these circumstances the personal and social development of the young person, their re-engagement with learning and learning how to learn is a primary concern. The Unit employs teachers (for learning) and social workers (for social care) and the inter-face between these two professional concerns, and their integration, was one focus for the project.

## **History**

Government statistical enquiry and academic research has consistently shown that the educational outcomes for children and young people in public care (including those in Secure Units) are seriously below national norms. The reasons include school and care placement breakdown, low expectations, and a lack of understanding and effective communication between teachers and social care staff. Academic papers have pointed to the differing and competing legislative frameworks; policy guidance, and training and practice of teachers and social care staff as important factors contributing to the underachievement of children and young people in public care. As such teachers and social care staff have different professional languages. The ELLI Learning Profile assessment tool has already demonstrated its usefulness in providing a new language for learning and for empowering students to take responsibility for themselves as learners. Young people in the care system have lost considerable power in their lives, what power they have is often expressed in anger and violence. The project was designed to explore whether ELLI Learning Profiles may have the potential to offer learners, teachers and their carers a vehicle to offer the learner power in determining how they may best learn and develop.

The Children's Act 2004 merged Education and Social Services into one department within local authorities. In this respect Vinney Green by virtue of its status has always been integrated and has the potential to offer research, policy and practice a pilot, or test bed, for the dynamic assessment of learning power as a vehicle for the integration of social care and education.

## **Aims**

The overall aim of this action enquiry was to explore the potential of the dynamic assessment of learning power to support planning for the learning and personal development needs of young people in the care. ELLI has its roots in the education field and identifies seven dimensions of learning power that are presumed to be indicators of a person's sense of themselves as learners and their capacity to grow and learn over time. Learners and their teachers respond to the data from this self-report tool and research suggests this leads to much greater ownership and engagement with their own learning

processes by both students and their teachers. The purpose of this project was to explore the parallels between social care and learning and the potential to develop a shared language for teachers and social care/workers, ultimately help to improve the life chances of some of our country's most vulnerable young people.

### **Questions**

- What are the characteristics of the learning profiles of young people in this secure unit?
- Can mediated, dynamic self assessment using ELLI Learning Profiles facilitate the young people in developing awareness and ownership of, and responsibility for their own learning?
- Does the language of learning power dimensions provide a link between social care and education?

### **Design and methodology**

The project was an action enquiry in which a researcher/practitioner facilitated the staff of the Unit in administering the Learning Profiles and using the data reflectively, diagnostically and formatively with individual learners.

Staff at the Unit were trained in the principles and applications of the ELLI Learning Profiles in 2005. As students entered the secure unit, they undertook a Learning Power Profile on online. Data from this profile was used diagnostically and formatively by the learner and their tutor to support the student in strengthening themselves as learners. The interpretation of the learning profiles and the proposed actions were agreed between learner and tutor. On leaving the Unit, or after the learning interventions which followed from the first assessment, the students were then reassessed to identify any changes. The learning interventions were devised by staff, according to the particular needs and circumstances of each individual learner. A learning conversation, looking at the student's learning profile, was the starting point for each intervention. During the summer of 2006, a researcher/practitioner was able to develop some specific, context driven enquiry projects with individuals, using the same methodology.

This report focuses on

- (i) The nature of the interventions and qualitative evidence of their impact
- (ii) The statistical evidence of the characteristics of the cohort as a whole, differences in learning profiles between genders and differences between the first and second assessments.

### **Characteristics of the cohort**

There were 32 students in total who participated in the research project. 13 of these were able to complete a second profile after the interventions. The following tables show the

gender distribution, the year group, and the mean learning power scores (pre-intervention)

Gender					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	F	7	21.9	21.9	21.9
	M	25	78.1	78.1	100.0
	Total	32	100.0	100.0	

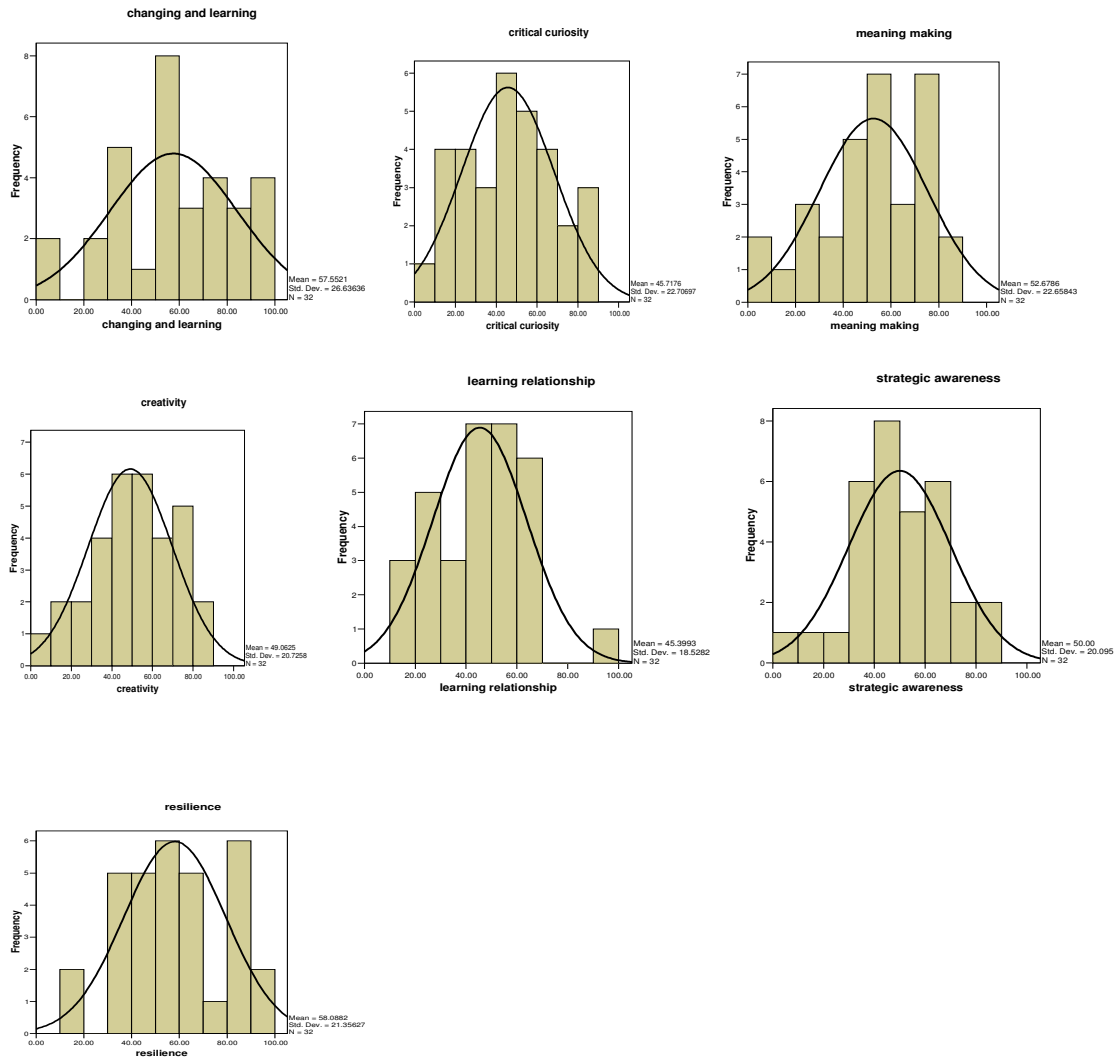
Year group					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	7.0	2	6.3	6.3	6.3
	8.0	2	6.3	6.3	12.5
	9.0	8	25.0	25.0	37.5
	10.0	8	25.0	25.0	62.5
	11.0	8	25.0	25.0	87.5
	12.0	4	12.5	12.5	100.0
	Total	32	100.0	100.0	

Descriptive Statistics for learning power scores						
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	
changing and learning	32	.00	100.00	57.5521	26.63636	
critical curiosity	32	.00	88.89	45.7176	22.70697	
meaning making	32	.00	85.71	52.6786	22.65843	
creativity	32	.00	86.67	49.0625	20.72580	
strategic awareness	32	.00	87.18	50.0000	20.09500	
learning relationship	32	13.89	97.22	45.3993	18.52820	
fragility and dependence	32	.00	84.31	41.9118	21.35627	
resilience	32	15.69	100.00	58.0882	21.35627	
Valid N (listwise)	32					

Table 1 Mean scores on learning power dimensions

As can be seen from this table, the highest mean score was resilience, though it should be noted that what is actually assessed is fragility and dependence. The scores are reversed so that in student and teacher feedback the positive pole of the dimension is in focus. Apart from fragility and dependence, the mean score was learning relationships, followed by critical curiosity. These scores are lower than average scores in the population as a whole, although it should be noted that the age range of this population ranges from 12 years to 18 years.

The following tables show the frequency distribution for each learning power dimension for the population as a whole.



**Table 2 Learning Power frequency distributions**






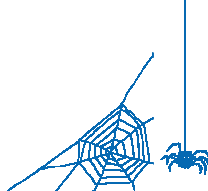
The charts in table 2 show an interesting finding in relation to resilience in that there are several students who report themselves to have very high levels of resilience (actually very low levels of fragility and dependence) and they fall outside of the normal distribution curve. As will be seen later, this warrants further exploration.


## The Interventions Qualitative Evidence

The Learning Power profile feedback to learners and their teachers was in the form of a spider diagram which gives a profile of how much of each dimension of learning power

the learner reports himself to have, at that particular time. The profile was discussed between the learner and the teacher and targets for change were identified. As in other settings, the use of metaphor, was helpful in enabling learners to access the concepts easily. In one example here, animal metaphors are used. However later in the project, the use of ‘Simpson Metaphors’ and the language of ‘learning zones’ was found to be more culturally appropriate. The following chart was given to each student with their profiles, to aid interpretation.

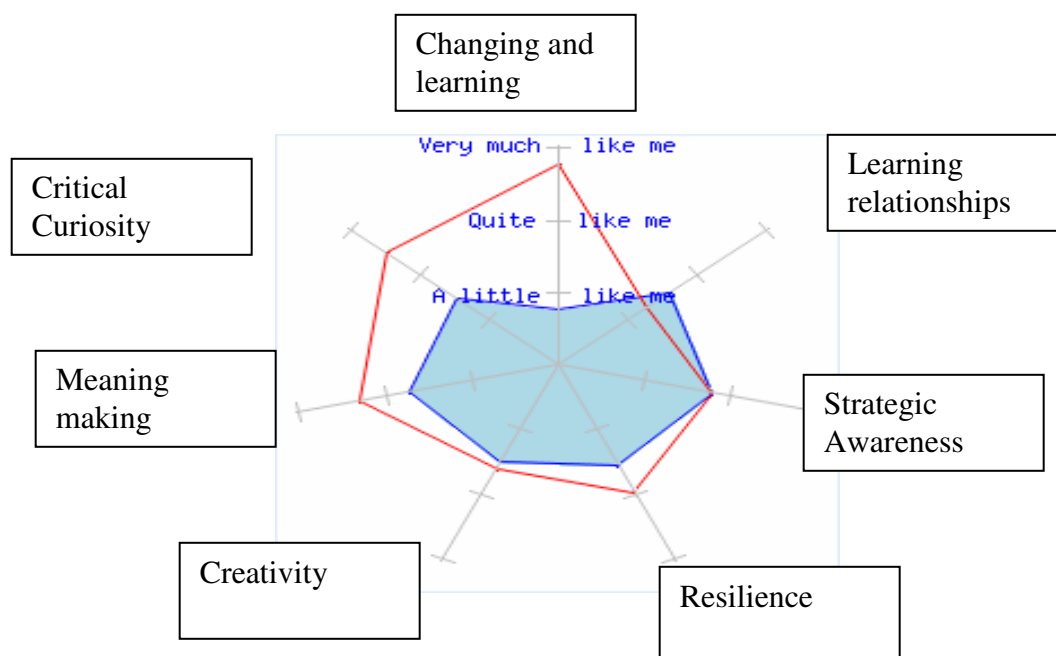
*ELLI (the Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory) helps people to understand how our 7 different ‘learning powers’ affect how we cope with new information, new ideas, new people and new situations. It also helps us to understand how we cope when we get stuck or upset when things are new or different. We use animals to help us remember what each area means!*

The Learning Power	What it means	The animal
Changing and learning	I can keep learning and keep changing. I am not stuck being me!	
Learning Relationships	It’s easy for me to share my ideas with others and talk about them. I like to work with others but I’m also good at sorting things out for myself and asking for help.	
Strategic Awareness	I like to look at things from different sides and work out what and how I’m going to do something.	
Resilience	I don’t give up easily when things get hard. I don’t mind being on my own. I like to do things at my own pace.	
Creativity	I like to think up new ideas and I like new challenges. I like to let my mind think freely.	
Meaning Making	I like to join up ideas and see links. To me learning is like making a web in my brain.	

Critical Curiosity	I like to work things out for myself . I ask lots of questions and have lots of energy.	
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A personal tutor discussed each profile with each learner, affirming strengths and identifying areas for development. The following individual case study is ‘Zach’ who was a 12 year old white boy (year 8). He was secured on welfare grounds (placing himself at risk and in danger). His mother died the previous September, his home life was chaotic. He lived with his dad who was a heavy drug user. Zach was encouraged to take drugs and there was a strong suspicion of selling himself for sex with his dad’s friends. There was little food at home and no boundaries for behaviour. He did not cope with school, with a poor history of attendance and challenging behaviour. He arrived at Vinney Green weighing under 4 stone and less than 4 foot tall. His induction assessment indicated normal levels of innate ability. He could read well and over the time in the Unit he grew seven inches and put on 1 stone in weight. His personality was outgoing, with a good sense of humour, and a great sense of fun: an ‘Artful Dodger’.

The following spider diagrams show his learning profile, before (blue) and after (red) the learning interventions. He had made significant improvements in his sense of self as a learner who could get better at learning and his critical curiosity.



The following tables show his negotiated interpretation of his profiles after the first profile event, and the second after the second evaluation.

<b>The Learning Power</b>	<b>The Animal</b>	<b>What it means for you</b>
Changing and learning	Chameleon	You think that you're not a good learner and so you think that learning is rubbish
Learning Relationships	Bee	You aren't really used to knowing how other people can help you to learn better.
Strategic Awareness	Owl	You have got a clear sense of what you're doing and what you're up to. You need to feel that you fit in a bit more.
Resilience	Tortoise	You're a bit wobbly when things get tough and you can get fretful and anxious.
Creativity	Unicorn	You like things to be simple and straight forward so you can understand them.
Meaning Making	Spider	Things in your life are quite muddled and separated. You need to be able to join up some of these bits (like going to school).
Critical Curiosity	Cat	You don't ask many questions – you just get on with things.

#### Report 1

What can we do to help you and what do you need to work on?

Well Z, we need to help you to get a good idea about how learning to be confident about yourself will help you to feel safe enough to try doing things differently – and to be so cool! You've had to get on with things by yourself a lot and that makes it hard for you to trust people or to ask them for help. Enjoy the time you have here to live safely and to be at school. I think you'll be surprised at how much your ELLI map will change as you get more confident!

Signed xxxxxxxx

Date December 2005

<b>The Learning Power</b>	<b>The Animal</b>	<b>What it means for you</b>
Changing and learning	Chameleon	You have come to believe in yourself as a learner and really enjoy it now.
Learning Relationships	Bee	You haven't quite worked out yet how best to go about things – on your own or getting help.



Strategic Awareness	Owl	You still have a clear sense of what you're doing and what you're up to. You still need to feel that you fit in a bit more.
Resilience	Tortoise	You're less wobbly when things get tough though you can still be a bit anxious.
Creativity	Unicorn	You continue to like things to be simple and straight forward.
Meaning Making	Spider	You have begun to make sense of things around you and understand that one thing leads to another.
Critical Curiosity	Cat	You feel able to ask more questions now and to be confident in asking 'why?'

## Report 2

How have things changed and how can this help you?

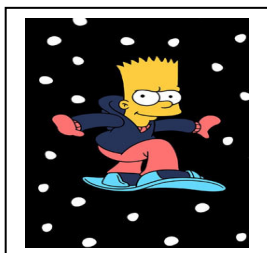
Z, you have learnt a whole lot of things whilst you've been with us – you've realised that you are a good learner, that you like it and that you can be quite good at it! You've developed confidence in yourself to be a learner too – you now need to take this knowledge with you and use it to keep learning!

Signed xxxxxxxx

Date April 2006

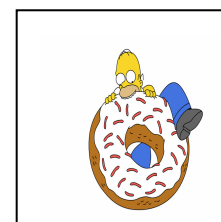
## Interventions

There was less data gathered about the nature of the interventions which took place in between these two assessment events. However



the following data show the nature of interventions with three of the same cohort.

Bart Simpson characters were used as metaphors for the learning power dimensions, for example, Homer Simpson takes you into the 'gritty zone' where you are resilient. Whereas Bart takes you into the 'springboard zone' of creativity. These icons were found



to be much more accessible to this type of learner and their slightly subversive qualities were important! Student projects began by choosing an object of personal interest and moved through observation and questioning through a sequential set of thinking and learning skills, to the final, evaluated presentation of a personal project.

Learners had frequently missed a lot of school in the past, but following the intervention programme, all demonstrated abilities to think deeply and critically, creatively and laterally. All however were quick to withdraw from activities which were uncertain or in

which they risked failure of any kind. This was highly frustrating for the researcher/practitioner – learners would demonstrate flashes of brilliance and then retreat. The learning profiles were variable as was the actual work produced. The projects which emerged were nevertheless fascinating and produced some moments of group conversations of an excellent quality; one young man designed a poster on why cannabis should be legalized for example, another a leaflet campaigning against football hooliganism and a third a poster on ‘What makes a good family.’ One young man mentioned with whom more individualized contact was made possible developed the intriguing theme of ‘Walls’ for his project, which involved forming the following framework of questions, based around his chosen object – his dog:

1. My dog and why he means a lot to me
2. Why do animals end up in shelters?
3. Why do they lock people up?
4. Does locking people up make a difference?
5. How have they got the power to lock people up?
6. What are their rights?

Due to constraints on time and resources, and this young man’s return to the group for subsequent sessions, the project focused on the earlier two questions, and the learner in question produced a well-researched poster on why bulldogs should not be banned!

Some of the learners presented their own profiles at legal meetings. Other care teams were particularly interested, such as the social care teams and the Forensic teams, who found the profiles useful because they were presented to them by the learners and represented what the learners said about themselves.

### Before and after measures

In order to discover whether there were any differences between the first profiles and the second profiles, undertaken after learning interventions, a paired sample T-test was computed on the 13 students who completed both assessments. As can be seen from the table below, there is an increase in reported learning power on all of the dimensions except resilience, where the direction is reversed.

**Paired Samples Statistics**

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	changing and learning	52.5641	13	24.38707	6.76376
	chnging2	71.7949	13	24.18545	6.70784
Pair 2	critical curiosity	45.5840	13	20.30768	5.63234
	curiosity2	56.6952	13	19.14882	5.31093
Pair 3	meaning making	54.2125	13	15.61760	4.33154
	meaningmaking2	61.5385	13	18.69329	5.18458
Pair 4	creativity	48.9744	13	19.64427	5.44834

	creativity2	59.2308	13	17.16768	4.76146
Pair 5	strategic awareness	50.8876	13	17.22745	4.77804
	strategic2	61.1440	13	23.54339	6.52976
Pair 6	learning relationship	45.2991	13	15.27292	4.23595
	Ingrelation2	51.7094	13	14.32368	3.97267
Pair 7	fragility and dependence	37.7074	13	17.07785	4.73654
	fragdep2	45.0980	13	18.49800	5.13042
Pair 8	resilience	62.2926	13	17.07785	4.73654
	resilience2	54.9020	13	18.49800	5.13042

Table 3 Descriptive statistics for paired samples

### Paired Samples Statistics

		Paired Samples Test							
		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	changing and learning - chnging2	-19.23077	27.50939	7.62973	-35.85453	-2.60701	-2.521	12	.027
Pair 2	critical curiosity - curiosity2	-11.11111	17.17337	4.76304	-21.48887	-.73335	-2.333	12	.038
Pair 3	meaning making - meaningmaking2	-7.32601	15.50551	4.30046	-16.69590	2.04388	-1.704	12	.114
Pair 4	creativity - creativity2	-10.25641	18.53233	5.13994	-21.45539	.94257	-1.995	12	.069
Pair 5	strategic awareness - strategic2	-10.25641	19.33023	5.36124	-21.93755	1.42473	-1.913	12	.080
Pair 6	learning relationship - Ingrelation2	-6.41026	13.38842	3.71328	-14.50080	1.68028	-1.726	12	.110
Pair 7	fragility and dependence - fragdep2	-7.39065	21.21145	5.88300	-20.20860	5.42730	-1.256	12	.233
Pair 8	resilience - resilience2	7.39065	21.21145	5.88300	-5.42730	20.20860	1.256	12	.233

The paired T tests demonstrate that the changes on changing and learning, critical curiosity reached statistical significance at the  $>.05$  level of significance, and creativity and strategic awareness were approaching that level. This means that something other than chance must account for those changes.

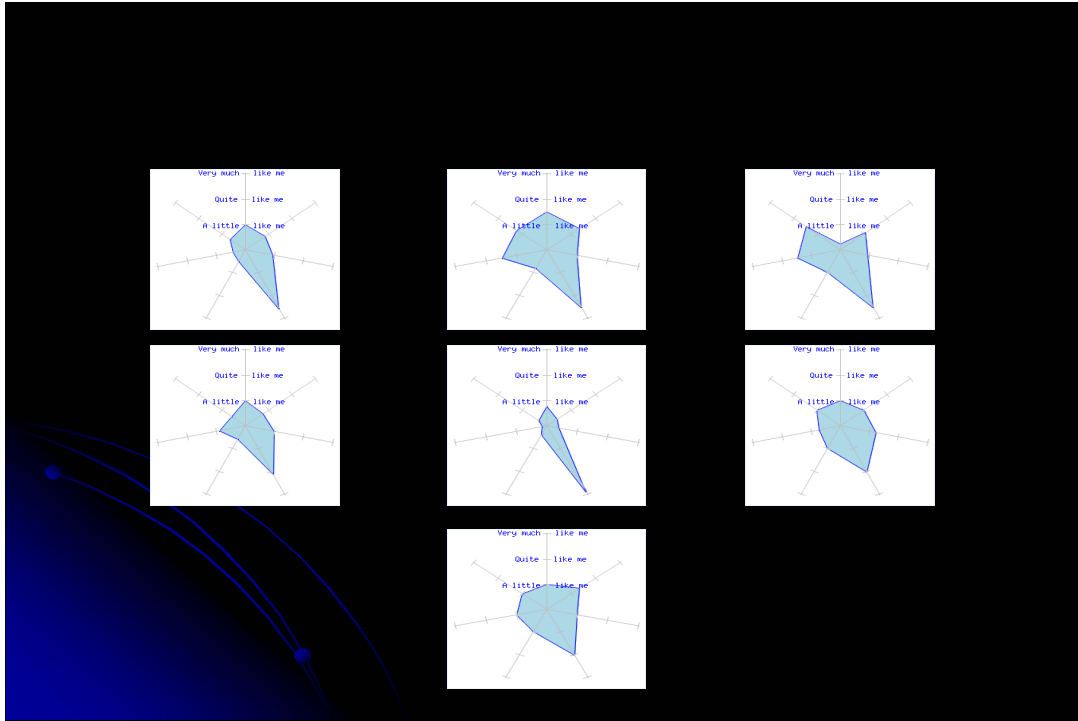
## Resilience

The drop in reported resilience measures is not significant, and the frequency charts, showing mean scores and standard deviation for the pre-test profiles on resilience are presented here.



**Table 4 Frequency tables for resilience pre interventions**

Of the thirty two learners in the cohort, 12 were convicted or remanded for ‘grave’ criminal activity. Of these seven were remanded for murder, arson, rape or false imprisonment. Of these seven had high mean scores in resilience and very low scores in all other dimensions. Seven typical examples of their spider diagrams are presented below:



The case summaries are presented in the table below, showing the mean scores on each dimension for each of the thirty two learners.

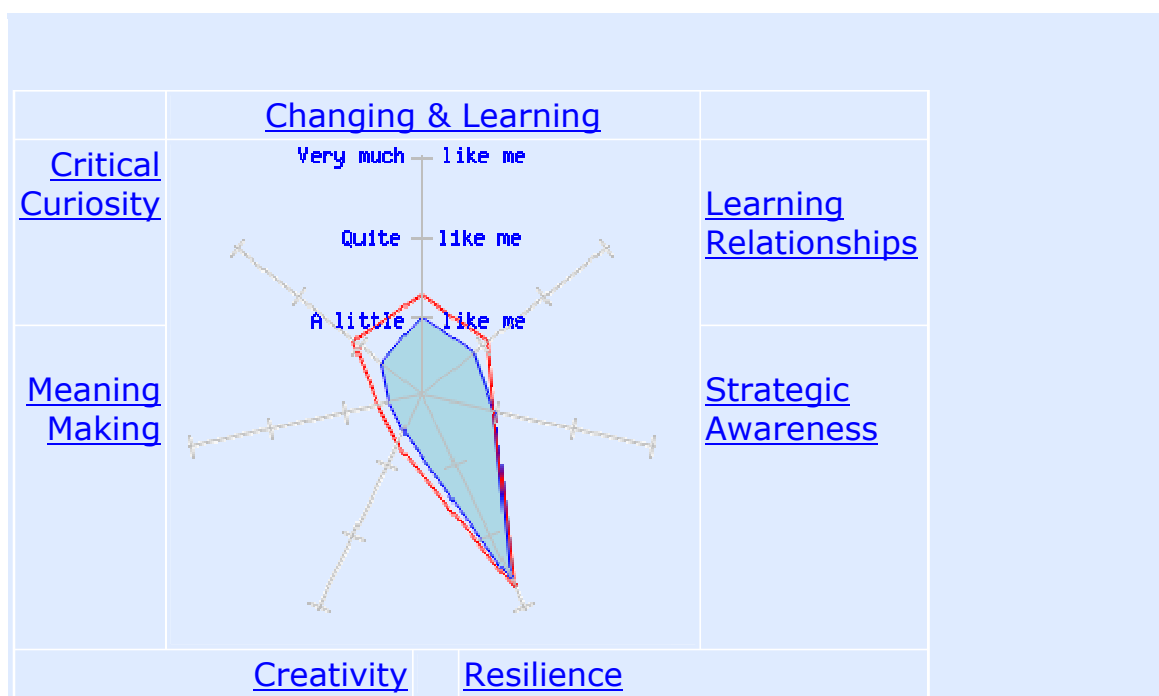
**Case Summaries(a)**

	Case Number	changing and learning	critical curiosity	meaning making	creativity	strategic awareness	learning relationship	resilience
1	1	58.33	40.74	57.14	40.00	48.72	50.00	56.86
2	2	83.33	62.96	76.19	66.67	79.49	27.78	39.22
3	3	75.00	70.37	71.43	80.00	69.23	33.33	60.78
4	4	8.33	48.15	47.62	33.33	30.77	36.11	84.31
5	5	66.67	51.85	76.19	70.00	53.85	97.22	47.06
6	6	66.67	66.67	66.67	66.67	66.67	61.11	33.33
7	7	100.00	88.89	85.71	86.67	87.18	61.11	80.39
8	8	33.33	22.22	14.29	16.67	30.77	27.78	86.27
9	14	50.00	40.74	57.14	60.00	43.59	55.56	58.82
10	15	66.67	55.56	47.62	60.00	56.41	50.00	49.02
11	16	83.33	29.63	57.14	53.33	58.97	47.22	62.75
12	20	33.33	66.67	57.14	70.00	66.67	63.89	50.98
13	21	50.00	40.74	47.62	26.67	33.33	44.44	84.31
14	24	75.00	25.93	33.33	46.67	25.64	58.33	49.02
15	25	33.33	33.33	23.81	33.33	41.03	33.33	66.67
16	26	25.00	48.15	57.14	50.00	58.97	52.78	50.98
17	28	50.00	33.33	47.62	46.67	41.03	22.22	45.10

18	29	33.33	18.52	28.57	20.00	33.33	25.00	70.59
19	30	83.33	85.19	76.19	73.33	82.05	41.67	19.61
20	31	100.00	66.67	76.19	50.00	41.03	58.33	31.37
21	32	41.67	48.15	61.90	50.00	64.10	58.33	35.29
22	33	100.00	81.48	76.19	76.67	74.36	47.22	56.86
23	34	75.00	14.81	47.62	43.33	66.67	63.89	50.98
24	35	50.00	29.63	57.14	40.00	48.72	16.67	66.67
25	36	58.33	14.81	52.38	33.33	30.77	22.22	45.10
26	39	100.00	51.85	85.71	46.67	66.67	66.67	15.69
27	40	75.00	74.07	66.67	70.00	56.41	41.67	80.39
28	41	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	16.67	100.00
29	42	33.33	33.33	33.33	33.33	33.33	44.44	66.67
30	43	25.00	11.11	4.76	13.33	12.82	13.89	96.08
31	44	50.00	55.56	71.43	56.67	48.72	47.22	82.35
32	45	58.33	51.85	23.81	56.67	48.72	66.67	35.29
Total	N	32	32	32	32	32	32	32

a Limited to first 100 cases.

The following table gives a learning profile of one of these cases and a narrative profile. It is followed with the second negotiated assessment outcome.



### Narrative

'E' is a 15 year old African black London boy (year 10). He was remanded for gang rape of two 13 year olds and false imprisonment. He came from a main stream secondary school and portrayed himself as able and expectant of GCSE success. The school

evidence didn't support this – and suggested he was both troubled and a trouble maker, with low levels of attainment, non-compliant with teachers requests – all rather low level ie feet on desks, no work, lateness, picking arguments and intimidatory. The secure unit's assessments indicated a range of ability within norms, reading age, accuracy and comprehension were acceptable. He continually reported to his review meetings (legal monthly ones) that the work set was too easy. The reality was he rarely did as he was asked because he couldn't risk failure. The assessment below was written after the evaluation of his second learning profile with the tutor:

<b>The Learning Power</b>	<b>The Animal</b>	<b>What it means for you</b>
Changing and learning	Chameleon	You are still not sure about your learning – but you have made a little progress towards trying new things.
Learning Relationships	Bee	You are still following the path of someone who looks like they are busy... but you're not really getting anything done.
Strategic Awareness	Owl	You have still to learn that there is more than one side to things.
Resilience	Tortoise	You are determined not to back down in any situation as you may see this as failure. You won't let anything go if you think you may lose face.
Creativity	Unicorn	You really don't like trying new ideas out.
Meaning Making	Spider	You remain focused on seeing things from your own point of view.
Critical Curiosity	Cat	You don't show much interest in changing the way you think about things.

### ***Report 2***

#### ***How have things changed and how can this help you?***

Well E, your 2<sup>nd</sup> report doesn't show much change to be honest. It seems to me that you haven't really accepted any of the challenges we have offered to you to think about how you could treat people differently and still earn their respect. It seem to me that you continue to believe that it is ok to disregard whatever anyone else thinks – whilst you continue to have the right to do, be or say whatever you feel. I would like for you to develop some empathy with others and to respect other peoples' rights to be treated fairly.

Signed XXXXXX

Date January 2006

### **Discussion and Conclusions**

These data suggest that the dynamic assessment of learning power may be a useful pedagogical tool with this type of at risk learner. It enables the learner to reflect 'backwards' to their sense of self and their learning identity and provides a mentored way of scaffolding the development of higher order thinking skills and personal awareness and development.

The findings relating to the subgroup convicted of violent crime are interesting and merit further research. It may indicate that such learners are disconnected from themselves as learners and from the impact of their actions on others. Their apparent resilience may be due to the absence of a positive relationship either with themselves or with other people, and a drive to achieve their own goals regardless of other considerations.

We recommend that the following further investigations:

- A development and research project exploring the application of this assessment methodology, including the personalised project methodology among a wider group of secure units, or residential schools for young people excluded from mainstream education.
- A survey of the whole national cohort of young offenders in secure units (n=>500) to test whether the findings in relation to resilience are sustained.

Ruth Deakin Crick  
Alison Salway  
November 2006